

Message Text

SECRET

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LIMDIS/NOFORN

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PINR, IT
SUBJECT: CARDINAL COLOMBO ON PRESIDENT CARTER AND ITALIAN
POLITICS

SUMMARY: CARDINAL PRAISED PRESIDENT CARTER, RE-AFFIRMED COMMITMENT TO LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC STATE AND SPECULATED ON ITALIAN POLITICS. END SUMMARY.

1. MILAN'S CARDINAL GIOVANNI COLOMBO IS CERTAINLY MOST IMPRESSIVE CHURCHMAN RECENTLY SEEN IN PRESENT AND PAST JURISDICTION OF MILAN CONSULATE. RARELY SEEN IN PUBLIC, SOMEWHAT INACCESSIBLE AND THIS YEAR PROBABLY OBLIGED TO RETIRE, COLOMBO HAS THE INTELLECTUAL STATURE, POLITICAL SENSE AND PUBLIC IMAGE THAT MAKE THE UNINITIATED LAYMAN IMAGINE HIM AS PAPABILE. WHETHER THAT HAS OCCURRED TO HIS PRINCELY PEERS, WE CANNOT SAY. DESPITE HIS INSISTENCE THAT HE READS PRESS WITH ONLY ONEEYE AND IS UNFAMILIAR WITH POLITICS, HE NEVERTHELESS HAS RATHER PRECISE POLITICAL VIEWS WHEN HE WANTS TO REVEAL THEM.

2. COLOMBO OPENED CONVERSATION WITH CONGENJAN 26 WITH ENTHUSIASTIC PRAISE FOR PRESIDENT CARTER. HE HAD CAREFULLY READ INAUGURAL ADDRESS AND FOUND HIMSELF ENTIRELY IN AGREEMENT WITH THE PRESIDENT'S APPROACH. IT WAS ESSENTIAL, HE SAID, FOR GOVERNMENT TO BE

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GUIDED BY UNCHANGING PRINCIPLES WHILE ADJUSTING TO CHANGING TIMES. NOT EVERY ACT OF STATE COULD CONFORM TO IDEAL. BUT LEADERS NEEDED TO HAVE BEFORE THEM BEACON SETTING THE ULTIMATE COURSE.

MOREOVER, PRESIDENT'S COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL EQUALITY, TO PEACE AND TO MORE EQUITABLE SOCIAL ORDER WERE FUNDAMENTAL TO HIS OWN CON-

VICTIONS. IN FACT, HE CONCLUDED, PRESIDENT'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS COULD BE PROUDLY SPOKEN BY ANY BISHOP.

3. CARDINAL WAS CRITICAL OF CONTINUING PRESSURE BY LOCAL AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENT THAT HE CONSIDERED ANTI-CATHOLIC. IT WAS ESSENTIAL, HE INSISTED, THAT STATE NOT TRY TO MONOPOLIZE EVERY ASPECT OF COMMUNITY LIFE. IT SHOULD REVUE THE CITIZEN AND NOT MAKE HIM ITS SERVANT. IT HAD TO ALLOW INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS FREEDOM TO EXIST AND PRACTICE SO LONG AS THEY DID NOT INTERFERE WITH FREEDOM OF OTHERS. STATE HAD TO BE NON-CONFESSIONAL, TO BE NEUTRAL TOWARD ATHEIST AND THEIST ALIKE, TO IMPOSE NO IDEOLOGY BUT THAT OF FREEDOM FOR ALL MEN. HE DEFENDED THE RIGHT OF ANY MAN TO BELIEVE IN NO RELIGION OR SOME RELIGION WITHOUT THE STATE REWARDING OR PUNISHING IN EITHER CASE. IT WAS THE ABSENCE OF THIS ESSENTIAL NEUTRALITY BY THE STATE THAT MADE COMMUNISM INTOLERABLE TO HIM.

4. HE WAS PERIODICALLY APPROACHED HE SAID, BY AN OLD FRIEND WHO WAS AN ATHEIST, A COMMUNIST PARTY LEADER RESPONSIBLE FOR LIAISON WITH THE SOVIET UNION WHO HAD LIVED AND STUDIED IN THE SOVIET UNION AND KNEW RUSSIAN AS WELL AS ITALIAN. HIS FRIEND WANTED THE CARDINAL'S APPROVAL FOR VARIOUS UNDESCRIBED COMMUNISTS WISHES. BUT IN THEIR CONVERSATIONS, THE COMMUNIST ADMITTED THAT THE SOVIET STATE WAS FAVORABLE TO ATHEISM AND DISCRIMINATED AGAINST ALL OTHERS. THAT WAS SOVIET COMMUNISM, HIS INTERLOCUTOR INSISTED. EUROCOMMUNISM WOULD BE PLURALISTIC, DEMOCRATIC AND NEUTRAL. TO WHICH THE CARDINAL REPLIED THAT IN THE ABSENCE OF SOME EXAMPLE OF EUROCOMMUNISM IN PRACTICE, HE WAS BEING CALLED UPON TO TAKE THAT ASSURANCE ON FAITH. AND HAVING THAT KIND OF FAITH IN MEN WAS NOT HIS FORTE. IF, INDEED, ITALIAN COMMUNISM WERE AS DEMOCRATIC
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AS IT CLAIMED TO BE, IT WOULD NO LONGER BE COMMUNISM AND THE PARTY SHOULD BE BROUGHT INTO THE GOVERNMENT.

5. THE ANDREOTTI GOVERNMENT, IN FACT, COULD NOT GO ON FOREVER. IT WAS UNNATURAL FOR A MINORITY TO GOVERN. IT SURVIVED BECAUSE OF CONSTANT COMPROMISES WITH THE COMMUNISTS. NO ONE WAS MORE ABLE IN THIS SITUATION THAN ANDREOTTI. THE CARDINAL WAS NOT SUGGESTING SOMEONE ELSE AS PREFERABLE. STILL, THE TIME WOULD COME TO END THIS WEAK GOVERNMENT.

6. FOR THE MOMENT, THERE WERE NO GOOD ALTERNATIVES. PERHAPS NEW ELECTIONS WOULD HELP. SO WOULD THE SPLIT IN THE MSI. HE HOPED THAT THE DEFECTORS COULD BECOME PART OF A MAJORITY THAT WOULD BE ANTI-COMMUNIST BUT LEFT OF CENTER IN SOCIAL POLICY.

7. COLOMBO WAS NOT CONVINCED THAT THE LOMBARDY DC WAS FULLY UNITED AGAINST FURTHER CONCESSIONS TO THE COMMUNISTS. HE CRITICIZED DC REGIONAL PRESIDENT GOLFARI'S "OPEN GIUNTA" FORMULA AND CLAIMED THAT MIAG MARCORA, BASE FACTION LEADER, WAS FAVORABLE TO THE

HISTORIC COMPROMISE. BUT, HE ADDED FIRMLY, MARCORA DID NOT REPRESENT THE ENTIRE DC. NOR, I CONCLUDED FROM HIS DRY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, DID THE GROWTH OF THE CLERICAL ANTI-COMMUNIST COMUNIONE AND LIBERATIO MOVEMENT WHOLLY PLEASE HIM EITHER.

8. HE WAS NOT PESSIMISTIC, HOWEVER. THE COMMUNIST PART IN THE NORTH HAD NOW REACHED A PLATEAU. FURTHER GROWTH IN THE SOUTH WAS LIKELY, BUT IN THE NORTH, HE BELIEVED THAT THE PCI HAD NOW LEVELLED OFF.

9. IN ANY EVENT, MUCH DEPENDED UPON THE UNITED STATES AND ITS NEW PRESIDENT. HE HOPED THAT THE PRESIDENT WULD SUCCEED IN HIS OBJECTIVES. TO DO THAT, HE CONCLUDED, AMERICA WOULD HAVE TO CONTINUE TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION OF ISOLATIONISM AND PLAY A FULL ROLE THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.FINA

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